

Crocodile Lake

National Wildlife Refuge



photo: USFWS



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staffed satellite of National Key Deer
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Refuge Facts

- Established: 1980.
- Acres: 6,686.
- Located in: Monroe County, FL.
- Refuge covers significant portion of north Key Largo, FL.
- Location: The refuge is located in north Key Largo, less than 40 miles south of Miami off SR 905 (Card Sound Road).
- Administered by National Key Deer Refuge.

Natural History

- Refuge includes disturbed man-made channels.
- Upland portions include the last stands of high tropical hardwood hammock and are critical habitat to Key Largo woodrat and cotton mouse and the only federally listed endangered insect in Florida: Schaus' swallowtail butterfly.
- Estimated acreage: upland hammock 1,805 acres; mangrove forests 4,213 acres; open water 668 acres.

Financial Impact of Refuge

- Refuge received one staff member in 1997, prior years it was unstaffed and managed as a satellite of National Key Deer Refuge (NKDR).
- While the refuge is currently closed to public use, projects are under way to create viewing areas and a small visitor center.
- FY 98 budget: \$60,000.

Refuge Objectives

- To provide habitat and protection for Federally listed threatened and endangered species.
- Provide habitat and protection for migratory birds.
- Protection of the globally endangered tropical hardwood hammock plant community.

- Provide opportunities for environmental education and public viewing of refuge wildlife and habitats.

Management Tools

- Mechanical/chemical control of invasive exotic plants.
- Interpretation/education.
- Routine wildlife monitoring.
- Law enforcement.
- Partnerships, both locally and nationally.

Calendar of Events

March-October: American crocodile breeding season.

April: National Wildlife Week.

April-July: Schaus' swallowtail season.

May: Migratory Bird Day.

October: National Wildlife Refuge Week.

Questions and Answers

Where is the refuge?

The refuge is in north Key Largo, FL, off Card Sound Road, on the Gulf side.

What is the difference between alligators and crocodiles?

Alligators and crocodiles are the two native north American crocodilian species in the U.S.. Crocodiles inhabit salt or brackish water, and alligators prefer freshwater. American crocodiles have a long, tapering, v-shaped snout—opposed to the u-shaped snout of the alligator. Also, crocs have a distinguishing fourth tooth that protrudes prominently outside of the lower jaw when closed. The largest American crocodile was 15 feet, but they are routinely found at lengths of 8.2 to 12.8 feet.

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Are crocodiles dangerous?

The stories of man-eating crocodiles don't originate from the United States. New world crocodiles are very timid reptiles and are especially wary of people. Female crocs are known to completely abandon their nests after just a single disturbance. For these reasons the crocodile habitats are completely closed to public access, except for the scientists studying their population and behavior.

Can we see a crocodile?

The refuge is closed to public access, and it is difficult to see a crocodile from the roads bordering the refuge. Crocodiles may be seen at nearby Everglades National Park.

Why is the refuge closed to the public?

Crocodile Lake NWR is closed to general public use due primarily to its small size and the sensitivity of the habitats and wildlife to human disturbance. Access to the refuge is by Special Use Permit only. The six federally endangered and threatened species indigenous to the refuge are highly susceptible to noise disturbance and the habitats they rely on for their survival can be adversely impacted by human traffic. The refuge staff are studying ways of providing for public use that are compatible with the refuge's natural resources. These include a wildlife observation platform, hardwood forest boardwalk and roadside butterfly meadows.